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Software for Qualitative Analysis

Editorial for the Virtual Special Issue on Software for Qualitative Analysis,
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This Virtual Issue of *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* is about the use of software to assist qualitative data analysis, a topic that has been a popular focus since the Journal's beginning back in 1998, with around 60 articles and a special issue on the subject. Some articles republished here reflect upon the 'big issues' raised by the use of specialist software to support analytical processes that until two decades ago could only be carried out by hand. Key issues include how the computer capabilities extend the analysis possibilities, are used in different research traditions, and enhance or impair researcher reflexivity. Other issues comprise the teaching and learning of qualitative methods, and the controversies and claims around using specialist software to support the generation of knowledge.

In their seminal issue on 'Qualitative research and computing' Crawley, Harré and Tagg (2002) outlined 'loss of data' as a key concern, for example when putting data into the computer as text and when abstracting ideas from data. Computer capabilities since then have greatly improved and now we can input video into some packages. Mavrikis and Geraniou (2011) outline how a particular package with simultaneous video and transcript coding capabilities (*Transana*) can be used to research learning environments. The issue of how computer capabilities may affect the abstracting of ideas remains. This seems to depend on the level of software familiarity and researcher reflexivity. Gilbert (2002) discusses three stages of data 'closeness' encountered by software users, and Woods, Macklin and Lewis (2016) identify specific 'reflexive moments' experienced by researchers.

The increasing use of software has not been without controversy, with a sense of skepticism towards its adoption by many scholars. For example, humanities and language-based research traditions have been slower in embracing such tools. In their paper, Paulus and Lester (2016) illustrate how a particular package (*ATLAS.ti*) has been used to support conversation and discourse analysis. They note limitations such as a lack of real-time collaboration, but argue that rather than taking control away from the researcher the software enables to solve a range of challenges. Hutchison, Johnston and Breckon (2010) discuss how another package (*QSR-NVivo*) can be employed to facilitate a grounded theory approach. And Odena (2013) considers how the uses of software may best be reported to substantiate researchers' claims and puts forward a generative model of social knowledge development.

The teaching and learning of computer-assisted qualitative research is another key topic in this issue. Johnston (2006) advocates for an integration of qualitative methods and software processes, to avoid disconnected methodological and technical learning curves. And Silver and Woolf (2015) outline a five-level pedagogy for teaching and learning computer-assisted qualitative analysis that spans methodologies, packages and teaching modes.

I hope readers enjoy the selection of papers, which is not intended to answer the above controversies. I wish this collection serves to stimulate further debate on the use of software for qualitative analysis in disciplines where it is already established and opens up the discussion in traditions where it is not.

Oscar Odena, Editorial Board Member *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*

The below articles are free to access until end of October 2017. To begin reading simply select the below link(s) of your choice.

- (1) Crowley, C., Harre, R., & Tagg, C. (2002) Qualitative research and computing: methodological issues and practices in using QSR NVivo and NUD*IST, *IJSRM*, 5(3), 193-197 (from Special Issue: Qualitative Research and Computing).
- (2) Gilbert, L. S. (2002) Going the distance: 'closeness' in qualitative data analysis software, *IJSRM*, 5(3), 215-228 (from Special Issue: Qualitative Research and Computing).
- (3) Johnston, L. (2006) Software and method: reflections on teaching and using QSR NVivo in doctoral research, *IJSRM*, 9(5), 379-391.

- (4) Hutchison, A. J., Johnston, L. H., & Breckon, J. D. (2010) Using QSR-NVivo to facilitate the development of a grounded theory project: an account of a worked example, *IJSRM*, 13(4), 283-302.
- (5) Mavrikis, M., & Geraniou, E. (2011) Using Qualitative Data Analysis Software to analyse students' computer-mediated interactions: the case of MiGen and Transana, *IJSRM*, 14(3), 245-252 (from Special Issue: Video Based Social Research).
- (6) Odena, O. (2013) Using software to tell a trustworthy, convincing and useful story, *IJSRM*, 16(5), 355-372.
- (7) Silver, Ch., & Woolf, N. H. (2015) From guided-instruction to facilitation of learning: the development of Five-level QDA as a CAQDAS pedagogy that explicates the practices of expert users, *IJSRM*, 18(5), 527-543 (from Special Issue: The Teaching and Learning of Social Research Methods).
- (8) Woods, M., Macklin, R., & Lewis, G. K. (2016) Researcher reflexivity: exploring the impacts of CAQDAS use, *IJSRM*, 19(4), 385-403.
- (9) Paulus, T. M., & Lester, J. N. (2016) ATLAS.ti for conversation and discourse analysis studies, *IJSRM*, 19(4), 405-428.

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